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C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAMA 001379

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ARPI

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [BA](#)

SUBJECT: SEPARATIST MOVEMENT EMERGES WITHIN BAHRAIN'S  
LARGEST OPPOSITION SOCIETY

Classified By: Ambassador William T. Monroe for  
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Following a period of speculation, Nezar Al Baharna, a prominent Shia businessman and former board member of the largest Shia opposition political society Al Wifaq, confirmed to the press in late August that he planned to establish a new political society called the Society of Justice and Development. Soon after, four other prominent Shia, businessman Jala Haji Hassan Al A'ali, leading cleric Seyad Deya'a Al Mousawi, Al Wifaq founding member Jawad Fairooz, and Chairman of the Central Governorates Municipal Council Nabeel Sayed, either publicly announced or indicated to PolOFF that they also intended to join the new society. In response, members of Al Wifaq staged a sit-in at its headquarters on September 1 to protest Al Baharna's move.

¶2. (C) Al Baharna's steps to establish the new society have fueled widespread complaints that he is intentionally trying to split Al Wifaq. But Al Baharna told PolOFF that his departure from Al Wifaq was due to lack of a consolidated platform and a clear vision for the future. Al Baharna said that Al Wifaq's current leadership insists on boycotting the 2006 national elections, as it did in 2002. He said his political society will participate in the democratic process and did not rule out his own candidacy in the 2006 parliamentary elections. Al Baharna did not comment whether his society would have a strictly Shia membership base, and added that increasing the number of political societies was beneficial because it brings about competition, resulting in more effective, responsive political organizations.

¶3. (C) Jawad Fairooz denied rumors that establishment of this new society was a GOB-backed plan to weaken the Shia. Fairooz told PolFSN on September 5 that he does not believe establishing a new party will split Al Wifaq and that the organization is strong enough to withstand the formation of a new society. He pointed to the ongoing struggles between hard-liner Hassan Mushaima and more moderate President Shaikh Ali Salman as evidence of Al Wifaq's strength and ability to withstand differences within the organization. Fairooz noted that Al Wifaq continues to attract the support of most Bahraini Shia.

¶4. (C) COMMENT: Al Wifaq's continued boycott of elections and single-minded focus on returning to the (very short) "heyday" of democracy in the early 1970's has meant that Bahrain's Shia have had little voice in governing or public decision-making. While Al-Wifaq has brought together Bahrain's Shia and forced the government to deal with it as a legitimate voice for the country's majority sect, the creation of Al Baharna's new society has the potential to become a significant move toward increased political participation in the country. END COMMENT.

MONROE